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## From Picture to Word to Picture in Tudor and Stuart England: Getting to the Word

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When I started working on this topic, I thought I would first remind my audience of the rapid, significant, and long-lasting transition from the word to the picture in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in England, when, within living memory of Shakespeare, Inigo Jones introduced the Neoclassic Ideal to the stage and, in so doing, ushered in the ultimate triumphs of both the imagistic picture over the emblematic word and of the architect-painter over the poet. I felt certain I would retain the party-line position that Jones uniquely replaced the word with the picture in England, after centuries of theatre and drama firmly rooted to the medieval tradition. Indeed, Jones brought significant changes to the fine and performing arts in England, but, as I got further into this topic, I have come to realize that something else is going on; that Jones essentially took the country back to a time when spectacle dominated over plot, when the picture was more important than the word. True, he did it imagistically within the Neoclassic Ideal and not emblematically, but he nevertheless did it. What emerged as new and different is the relatively brief logocentric period from the accession of Edward 6 in 1547 to the *Masque of Blackness* at Court in 1605, a period during which the word dominates over the picture and when the greatest writers of dramatic poetry ever in English emerge and prosper.

The simple view--and the one most easily taught--places the shift from the word to the picture in England with Inigo Jones and his masques at the Stuart court. In 1605, the huge change can be seen with Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, designed by Jones, which introduced a "naturalization of the Italian ideal" to England (Brockett/Hildy 8<sup>th</sup> 181), which would not be fully developed, adapted, and accepted by the public until 1660. The great medieval emblematic tradition, where a crown and mace alone established and presented the idea of kingship to an audience, for example (and where a depiction of an actual castle was unnecessary to represent kingship), where the Chorus tells us openly to let our "imaginary forces work" to place us actually on the field of battle (instead of "within this wooden O" of the Globe), gave way very rapidly after 1605 to an obsession with reality-based spectacle and found the architect/painter ascend just as assuredly as the craftsmen of words descended. And, perhaps most startling of all, this architect/painter dominance over the poet began

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before Shakespeare had written some of his best plays and was essentially completed in living memory of him.

A closer look at the evidence, however, reveals that the shift from word to picture (a shift I should add remains unchanged today with our obsession with action films) is much more complex and convoluted in the sixty years which precede Jones's coming to Court than would appear at first glance.

What fascinates me about this period as a result of the work I did as editor of the *REED Bristol* volume (Toronto, 1997) is the following, none of which made its way into the final Bristol volume:

(1) Before the accession of Edward 6 in 1547, the fine and performing arts reaffirmed the faith visually and emblematically: the heavily carved high altars, the stained-glass windows, the statuary, the murals on interior church walls, and the pageants and processions associated with Corpus Christi (and other festivals).

(2) With the accession of Edward 6 in 1547, the surviving documents in Bristol confirm the removal of high altars in favor of 'simple' tables, stained-glass windows (intensely colored 'stories' replaced by plain clear non-narrative glass) and statuary (beheaded and pricked to see if they bled before being removed), the whitewashing over of the murals on interior church walls (with the subsequent writing of the Ten Commandments on the newly whitewashed walls), and the cessation of Corpus Christi and other processions and festivals (with their use of parish and guild pageants).

With the accession of Edward 6, then, and the Protestantization of England, the movement is towards the imagistic word and away from the emblematic picture, reaffirming the faith not through the emblematic visual tradition of the affective Catholic past, but through a new cognitive Protestant logo-centric system.

(3) But it's not over in 1547, because this affective Catholic obsession with pictures re-emerges under Mary 1 in 1553, as one might expect. In Bristol, the parishes bring back the high altars, stained-glass windows, and statuary, and they restore the murals (either

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repainting them or removing the white-wash), and they re-institute the Corpus Christi processions with their use of parish and guild pageants as though they had never been stopped.

(4) But under Elizabeth 1 in 1558, it really is over, when we see the second (and final) removal of the high altars, stained-glass windows, and statuary, the (final) whitewashing of the murals on church walls (with the last writing of the Ten Commandments over the newly whitewashed walls), and the absolute cessation of the Corpus Christi processions with their use of parish and guild pageants (even though these physical pageants themselves will remain in inventories at least until 1642).

(5) Not long after 1558, we also see the pervasive hiring of preachers at great expense to the parishes, including John Northbrooke, author of *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays and Interludes* (1576), who preach regularly and routinely in the outdoor arena of the College Green, a park-like setting adjacent to Bristol Cathedral.

By the 1570s, to be sure, John Northbrooke and others thus come to the College Green to preach every Thursday, at great relative expense to the parishes. They are paid up to £3/6/8 each quarter, when the parish rectors typically are paid five pounds per year at this time. The faith would now clearly be reaffirmed through oratory instead of through the fine and performing arts and the mysteries associated with the mass.

With some knowledge of what's going on in Bristol, England, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then, especially associated with the accession of Henry VIII's three children, I thus became less fascinated by the dominance of the picture over the word under Jones at the Jacobean court and more interested in answering the question, "How does England 'Get to the Word'?" Because it's clear that the Jacobean shift from word to picture occurs sixty years later than the Edwardian picture-to-word shift which can only be described as a severe Protestant reaction which removes that which is artistic, processional, and performative, and replaces it with a kind of literalist simplicity: written words on walls, plain clear-glass windows, no icons in niches or on pedestals (bleeding or otherwise), a plain table instead of a heavily carved high altar, and oratorical preaching rather than performative processions with pageants. The Wire drawers pageant, for example, which had for generations emblematically reaffirmed the

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faith at the annual Corpus Christi procession through the City, is literally packed away forever after 1558 in favor of parishioners reading WORDS written on church walls and hearing preachers speaking WORDS.

Thus the movement from word to picture under Jones, which champions imagistic verisimilitude after 1608, is really much more complex than merely the naturalization and full expression of the Neoclassic Ideal. What Jones does, in a very real sense, is to take England 'back to the future,' since his contribution is much more akin to the pre-Shakespearean Catholic emblematic picture that dominated before the accession of Edward VI than to the Protestant imagistic word we get after 1558. This 60-year word phase, which produced Marlowe and Shakespeare, was really quite short and was arguably atypical of the performative artistic preferences of the nation.

This shift from picture to word and finally back to picture reflects a sea change in philosophical thinking as well as a huge human predisposition to prefer the picture over the word, whether it is a Catholic emblematic picture or a more 'secular' imagistic picture based on the principles of the Neoclassic Ideal. What is going on inside the head of someone who whitewashes a medieval mural that depicts artistically the Ten Commandments and then writes out the Ten Commandments over the newly dried whitewash? Is this solely hatred for the 'boar of Rome,' the great antichrist who sits improperly on the throne of St. Peter? Certainly, it's that, to be sure, but it's also more. I think it reflects a change in the way people perceive their world and themselves in that world. It reflects a need to move away from visual emblems and their heavy emotional baggage and toward reaffirming the faith through the 'new' notion of cognitive reading and/or hearing words instead of affectively feeling the faith through the presentation of the fine and performing arts (theatre, painting, statuary, stained glass). Maybe this shift represents at least an attempt to shift from the affective to the cognitive side of the brain? But whatever is going on, this shift is short-lived because we human beings love the picture and we consistently re-embrace the picture throughout our theatre history, a condition with the fine and performing arts that continues to this day. We still much prefer the picture to the word, spectacle to plot, the affective to the cognitive.

So what is actually new under Jones: the 'actual reality,' that is, the IMAGISTIC emphasis associated with the Neoclassic Ideal. But the visual impulse, the impulse and desire

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for the picture, pre-dates him by centuries. Thus Jones brings BACK to England, with his introduction of Italianate staging, what England already had and loved pre-1547: the picture, albeit an imagistic rather than an emblematic one. Jones's is a less politically contentious visual impulse, to be sure, but what Jones really accomplishes is to get things back the way they were, to get the country back into its 'picture' mode after a half century of word-dominated artistic expression. The impulse had always been visual, and the 'WORD period,' from 1547 to 1608, was really an anomaly, one could argue. This anomaly produces Marlowe and Shakespeare, that is to say, greatness, but it is nevertheless an artistic anomaly.

So Jones is not the innovator, and the 1558-1608 period (characterized by Shakespeare) is aberrant but innovative.

The ushering in of Protestantism then brings with it a concern for the word, and language and writing are by their very nature emblematic and arbitrary. This new reliance on the word ultimately permits great writers of words like Marlowe and Shakespeare to prosper.

Marlowe, Shakespeare, and others take this new method of artistic expression, the word, and run with it. They format English words, sounds, and sentences into new combinations in such a way as to have genuinely lasting (and unique) value and do so to a degree of artistry not seen since.

When the picture comes back into vogue as a dominant artistic method of persuasion with Inigo Jones in the early 1600s, during Shakespeare's lifetime, and finally dominates the English public performative arts from the Restoration to this present day, the circle is complete. When Jones succeeds in the domination of the picture over the word, he brings back a continuing and ancient English artistic tradition.